

# The Image of Byzantium in Twelfth-Century French Fiction: a Historical Perspective

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A substantial part of scholarly discussion concerning the East-West relations in the crusading era revolves around what many have called “a cultural clash”, that is the confrontation (and coexistence) of two Christian civilisations with different mentalities, customs, sets of values and sense of distinctness from each other.<sup>1</sup> As a result it has become commonly accepted among Byzantinists that from the eleventh century onward Latin Europe adopted certain stereotyped views of the Eastern Empire and its inhabitants that underlined a feeling of otherness and set Byzantium in an ambiguous light.<sup>2</sup> The stereotype fluctuated between admiration of Byzantine exoticism and criticism of Byzantine character. To be more precise, for the Latin West Byzantium evoked thoughts of an exotic dreamlike Orient, splendour, riches, generosity of the emperors and, naturally, the renown and sanctity of Constantinople. Not necessarily in opposition to these notions stood Western denouncement of Greek perfidy, effeminacy, cowardice, indolence, arrogance, insincere flattery and lack of honour.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The records of the stereotypes in question occasionally pre-date the 11<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Liutprand of Cremona's *Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*), but their wider dissemination is particularly linked with the beginning of the crusading era. Sibyll Kindlimann, *Die Eroberung von Konstantinopel als politische Forderung des Westens im Hochmittelalter: Studien zur Entwicklung der Idee eines lateinischen Kaiserreichs in Byzanz*, Zürich, Fretz und Wasmuth Verlag, 1969, p. 31-44.

<sup>3</sup> The list could be even longer, but, essentially, all notions can be condensed into the two most important terms – perfidy and effeminacy. Cf. Marc Carrier, “Perfidious and Effeminate

The opposition of the two groups is not self-evident since the positive attributes of the first set could equally have had negative connotations, especially when used as aggravating circumstances of treachery.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, despite certain level of individuality and period-related changes, there remains an impression of a prevalent negative attitude.

Having described the basic medieval clichés about Byzantium that are of fundamental importance for the present study we must, however, also inquire after their origin. In fact, conclusions about Westerners' perceptions of the Empire have been drawn almost exclusively from analyses of conventional historical sources, most importantly crusading chronicles, but also religious treatises or papal documents.<sup>5</sup> Another type of literature – fiction – has not been subject to an equal debate in this context and the few historians who included imaginative literature in the body of their sources rightly called attention to its considerable potential.<sup>6</sup> The principal question that needs to be answered

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Greeks: The Representation of Byzantine Ceremonial in the Western Chronicles of the Crusades (1096–1204)", *Annuario dell'Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica Venezia*, 4, 2002, p. 48–68. An interesting minute analysis of contradictions of Eastern and Western mentalities (e. g. Byzantium's more affirmative attitude towards the use of pretence) underlying the development of these prejudices was done by the same author in *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades : les Byzantins vus par les chroniqueurs du monde latin (1096–1261)*, Éditions universitaires européennes, 2012, p. 45–67.

<sup>4</sup> Compare a French chronicler's commentary on the emperor Manuel I's courtesies in favour of Western crusaders in 1147: "We recall these favors on the part of the emperor so that there may be manifest the treachery of him who simulated the friendship which we are accustomed to show only to our most intimate friends, while he harboured a feeling which we could not have appeased save by our very death." Odo of Deuil, *De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem*, ed. Virginia G. Berry, New York, WW Norton & Company, 1965, p. 69. Trans. V. G. Berry. Unless indicated otherwise, all further translations are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Although it is impossible to separate the religious aspect from the overall picture of Western perceptions of Byzantium, theological and ritual debates between the two Christian churches are of no interest here since they have been already subject to a rich scholarly discussion among specialist in this wide area of research. The secondary literature on the problem of Latin views of Byzantium, whether from religious or lay perspective, includes, but is far from limited to: Martin George Arbabi, *Byzantium in Latin Eyes: 800–1204*, Thesis – Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 1969; Bunna Ebels-Hoving, *Byzantium in Westerse Ogen, 1096–1204*, Assen, Van Gorcum, 1971; Krijnie N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers to Byzantium, 962–1204: Cultural and Political Relations*, Leiden, New York, Köln, E. J. Brill, 1996; Tia M. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2000; M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, *op. cit.*, p. 321; K. N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 87. There is a vast number of literary and philosophical treatments of Byzantine material in *chansons de geste* and courtly romances, but these have little in

is whether Byzantium's representation in fiction conforms to the described tropes of contemporary historiography and if not how does it differ. According to my observations, there is indeed a great contrast between the two kinds of sources especially with regard to the personal qualities of the Byzantines, which leaves us with two opposing images – one stained with dark ink of medieval chroniclers, the other painted in lighter shades of poets' fantasy.

For these reasons I wish to present here a separate examination of the imaginative literature that compares the portrayal of Byzantium in a sample of twelfth-century fictional oeuvres of French provenance with the common Byzantine stereotype as known from contemporary crusade-related narratives in order to prove that, contrary to some suggestions,<sup>7</sup> the poets provided a perhaps surprisingly positive review of the Eastern Empire. In this context it is necessary to acknowledge the exhaustive work on crusading chronicles' depiction of Byzantium done by Marc Carrier to which I frequently refer and intend to complement.<sup>8</sup> Not strictly in line with his example it should be specified that the subject matter of this study is Western representation, portrayal or image of Byzantium and not so much a similar term "perception" that could be defined rather as an act of mind.<sup>9</sup> Since it is impossible to cover the whole crusading period in one article my scope has been narrowed to the twelfth century, the time when a culturally fertile territory of medieval France in the heart of Latin Europe gave rise to the first corpus of Byzantine-related fictional works in the

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common with preoccupations of historical scholarship as in the case of the recent publication by Rima Devereaux with a promising title *Constantinople and the West in Medieval French Literature: Renewal and Utopia*, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2012. In the time that has elapsed since the submission of this article, there appeared an exhaustive French thesis treating the image of the Byzantine emperor in French and German sources including fiction. I gladly thank its author, Clément Wingler, for letting me view its table of contents and thus drawing my attention to two other possible sources not included in the present paper: *Guillaume de Palerme* and *Doon de la Roche*. The thesis should be published later this year and will also include a detailed analysis of these works.

<sup>7</sup> A suggestion that the ambiguous picture of Byzantine world described above was shared by both historical as well as fictional writings of the period was proposed in the context of Professor J. C. Cheynet's lecture in Thessaloniki in July 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See note 3. I have chosen this text as a basis for my comparison not because of a lack of other publications on the topic but on account of its greatest complexity and summarising work done by the author.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: français, historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique, scientifique, etc.*, t. XII, Genève / Paris, Slatkine, 1982, p. 582: "La perception est un acte de l'esprit qui prend possession d'une chose par l'idée qu'il s'en forme et qui reste en lui."

vernacular. Our sample includes: the *Chanson d'Antioche*, *Girart de Roussillon*, *Macario* or the *Reine Sebile*, the *Pèlerinage of Charlemagne*, *Partonopeus de Blois*, *Cligès*, *Eracle* and *Ille et Galeron*.<sup>10</sup> These poems have been mostly preserved in thirteenth-century manuscripts therefore it is always possible that the texts may have been altered by later editors. To complicate the situation further, one must take into account divergent variants of the same story that emerged in the process of its circulation. (Fortunately, in most of the cases modern editors facilitate our task by having determined the reading closest to the original with indication of variants and modifications.) Although this type of source might as a result be more fluid than conventional historical material, there is no reason to reject fiction's potential contribution to our debate as I shall outline shortly. Most immediately, I shall proceed to the very heart of this paper – comparison of the image of Byzantium in our sample with the ambivalent and rather negatively inclined stereotype of crusading chronicles.

The first remark to be made is that each of the eight fictional texts analysed here describe the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople or its sovereign as distant, rich, powerful or venerable on account of saintly relics.<sup>11</sup> As a rule, French fiction coincides with contemporary historical writings in its representation of Byzantium as a splendid and curious foreign place. The motifs of a far away country, riches and exoticism are particularly striking in as much as even items of fiction without any Byzantine link used references to

<sup>10</sup> Principal editions cited in this paper are: *La chanson d'Antioche : chanson de geste du dernier quart du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. and trans. Bernard Guidot, Paris, Champion, 2011; *La chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, eds. and trans. Micheline de Combarieu du Grès – Gérard Gouiran, Paris, Librairie générale française, 1993; *Macaire : chanson de geste*, ed. M. F. Guessard, Paris, Franck, 1866; *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne [Le pèlerinage de Charlemagne]*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess with an Introduction by Anne Elizabeth Cobby, New York, Garland, 1988; *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, ed. and trans. Olivier Collet – Pierre-Marie Joris, Paris, Librairie générale française, 2005; Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, eds. Stewart Gregory – Claude Luttrell, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1993; Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, eds. and trans. Karen Pratt, London, King's College, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2007; Gautier d'Arras, *Ille et Galeron*, ed. and trans. Penny Eley, London, King's College, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Some examples include: *La chanson d'Antioche*, *op. cit.*, v. 873, p. 256, v. 1028, p. 266; *La chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, *op. cit.*, v. 94, p. 48, v. 208, p. 56, v. 271-276, p. 60; *Macaire*, *op. cit.*, v. 19, p. 4, v. 443, p. 38, v. 2065, p. 172; *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, *op. cit.*, i, v. 27, p. 30; *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, *op. cit.*, v. 1677, p. 156, v. 4565-4566, p. 312, v. 4951, p. 332; Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, *op. cit.*, v. 48, p. 2, v. 125, p. 5, v. 4300-4305, p. 155; Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, *op. cit.*, v. 6509, p. 194; Gautier d'Arras, *Ille et Galeron*, *op. cit.*, v. 6218-6223, p. 208-210. "Rice" and "poissans" (in various spelling variants) are the most frequent adjectives.

Constantinople as synonyms of these terms.<sup>12</sup> Yet, in contrast to chronicles which tended to be rather down to earth, fiction expanded the idea into the realm of the supernatural, as will be evident in a later stage of the present discussion. Also, unlike historians, authors of fiction never interconnected Byzantine exoticism with pretence or treachery.

Crusading chronicles contain not only that group of positive notions relating to the riches and exoticism of Byzantium as a country, but also a set of negative stereotypes (perfidy, effeminacy etc.) associated with the Byzantines as a people. The former set of characteristics represents a meeting point of historiography and fiction. As for the latter, can a similar link be drawn between the two genres? Do these criticising tropes occur in fiction at all? And if so, are they used to generate the same effect as in historiography? To begin with, it is striking how rare is the overt association of the Byzantines with adjectives such as perfidious, effeminate, cowardly, lazy, arrogant and dishonourable or with their synonyms and derivatives. Various spelling variants and derivatives of the words *felon*, *traître* (treacherous, traitor), *malin artos* (cunning, despicable), *engagner* (trick, deceive), *boisdie* (deceit, cunning) and *orgilous* (arrogant) occur approximately twenty times all together and more than two thirds of this number are to be found in only two sources, the *Chanson d'Antioche* and *Ille et Galeron*. On the other hand, *Cligès*, *Partonopeus de Blois* and *Eracle* do not contain any of the said forms, a phenomenon which is by no means accidental and foreshadows a more general attitude of the particular works. Another important observation is that even if these denominations are present in a text they tend to be restricted to a single person; never do they indicate a common attribute of the entire Byzantine population, which is often the case in the chronicles from the second generation of the First Crusade histories onwards.<sup>13</sup> And finally, although direct or implied allusions to the chronicle-like stereotypes can appear, there usually are several factors that prevent them playing a decisive part in the reader's overall impression of Byzantium and dissuade us from an unfavourable interpretation.

<sup>12</sup> Examples of this use of Byzantine references can be found in the Appendix 2 of R. Devereaux, *Constantinople and the West*, op. cit., p. 192-197.

<sup>13</sup> While the author of *Gesta Francorum* focused his criticism on the Byzantine emperor Alexios I exclusively, a gradual generalising of anti-Byzantine characteristics is observable from the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, op. cit., p. 263-266.

### *Contrasting representation of Byzantine characters*

Our argument must inevitably begin with a source that is, in its content as well as inspiration, closest to the tradition of historical narratives and occupies a very distinct place among the writings of our corpus. The text in question is the famous *Chanson d'Antioche*, the earliest extant version of which comes from late twelfth-century North-Eastern France.<sup>14</sup> It is attributed to (the author or benefactor) Graindor de Douai who might have built upon an older tradition. The supposed original used to be credited to a certain Richard le Pèlerin and taken as a contemporary eyewitness account of the First Crusade. However, ever since the groundbreaking publication of R. F. Cook in 1980 the existence of such an original *chanson de geste* and such a person have been contested.<sup>15</sup>

Far more important for the present purpose than the problem of the text's exact dating and authorship are its unmistakeable parallels with several crusading chronicles (most importantly Albert of Aachen and Robert the Monk)<sup>16</sup> that could perhaps point to the former's influence on the latter. However, with reference to Edgington's and Sweetenham's recent overview of the problem the most probable scenario presumes firstly the existence of a popular tradition (the genre of this tradition is unknown) about the First Crusade or at least about the siege of Antioch – parts of which can be traced in the earliest chronicles – that, by the end of twelfth century, evolved into a *chanson de geste*. The *chanson* was at that time reworked to the known

<sup>14</sup> Various arguments have been proposed in order to set the date more accurately to 1177, between 1180 and 1190 or to 1192, definitely no earlier than the third quarter and most probably around the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century. See the Introduction to *La chanson d'Antioche*, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Introduction to *The Chanson d'Antioche: an Old French Account of the First Crusade*, trans. Susan B. Edgington – Carol Sweetenham, Farnham / Burlington, Ashgate, 2011, p. 13-15; Introduction to *La chanson d'Antioche*, ed. Jan Nelson, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2003, p. 28; Robert Francis Cook, "Les épopées de la croisade", In: *Aspects de l'épopée romane : Mentalités, Idéologies, Intertextualités*, eds. Hans van Dijk – William Noomen, Groningen, Egbert Forsten, 1995, p. 98; Suzanne Duparc-Quioç, *La chanson d'Antioche*, t. II, Étude critique, Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1978, p. 132-139;

<sup>15</sup> Robert Francis Cook, "Chanson d'Antioche", *chanson de geste : le cycle de la croisade est-il épique ?*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins B. V., 1980. In this context see particularly chapters 4 and 5 of the *Première Partie*.

<sup>16</sup> Apart from the two authors some see also resemblances to the chronicles of Orderic Vitalis, William of Tyre, Peter Tudebode, Raymond of Aguilers, Foulcher of Chartres, Ralph of Caen and Guibert of Nogent. Cf. R. F. Cook, "Chanson d'Antioche", *chanson de geste...*, *op. cit.*, p. 72-74; *The Chanson d'Antioche*, *op. cit.* (S. Edgington – C. Sweetenham), p. 9-10; *La chanson d'Antioche*, *op. cit.* (S. Duparc-Quioç), p. 149-213.

version of the *Antioche* whose author would by then have had access to other historical narratives of which he used above all Robert the Monk and some source close to Albert of Aachen.<sup>17</sup>

The chanson narrates a story of the First Crusade up to the point of the capture of Antioch in 1098 and contains passages on the crusaders' dealings with the Byzantine emperor that are of greatest significance here. As already stated, the *Chanson* is often in agreement with contemporary historiography, with the portrayal of Byzantium being no exception. Criticism in the *Antioche* centres exclusively on the Byzantine emperor, who is not actually named, but can be none other than Alexios I Komnenos. He is described as "very disloyal and a proven traitor".<sup>18</sup> The unfavourable image depends heavily on two aspects.

Firstly, according to the chanson, when the crusaders from numerous Western realms reach Constantinople on their way to the Holy Land, the emperor decides to unjustifiably destroy the pilgrims despite the fact that he called for their military help himself and assured them of his support. Once the plan has failed the emperor pretends friendship and "Through downright treason"<sup>19</sup> he regains trust. The "villainous man"<sup>20</sup> secretly cuts off the armies from Byzantine supplies so that they would perish of famine. The friction accompanied by a threat of a Latin assault on Constantinople is finally soothed after crusaders' promise to become the emperor's vassals,<sup>21</sup> but not without many accusations of deceit, betrayal and malice.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, after a period of amity the emperor's image of a traitor is corroborated later in the story by his not providing promised reinforcements in the time of need when the pilgrims besiege the city of Antioch. Although he acts in a wrong belief that the crusaders have been already massacred by the Turks, the author of the *Antioche* does not exempt him from blame.

<sup>17</sup> *The Chanson d'Antioche*, op. cit. (S. Edgington – C. Sweetenham), p. 10-19.

<sup>18</sup> *La chanson d'Antioche*, op. cit., xlii, v. 1015, p. 266: "molt fel et traïtres proves".

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxviii, v. 912-913, p. 258: "Par droite traïson".

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxviii, v. 914, p. 258: "cuvert".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xlii, v. 1077, p. 270: "ti home". In view of later use of the unambiguous noun "homage" (xlvii, v. 1099, p. 272), the present term is probably used in its particular sense "vassals", although in reality the oath taken by crusaders might have been merely a fealty. J. H. Pryor, "The Oaths of the Leaders of the First Crusade to Emperor Alexius I Comnenus: Fealty, Homage – Πίστις, Δουλεία", *Parergon*, 1, 1984, p. 111-141.

<sup>22</sup> *La chanson d'Antioche*, op. cit., xxxix, v. 932, p. 260, v. 951, p. 260, xl, v. 971-972, p. 262, xlii, v. 1015, p. 266.

Plus the decision to turn the Byzantine relief army that was already half-way to Antioch back to Constantinople might imply the ruler's fear of the Turks and natural cowardice.<sup>23</sup>

A person acquainted with the history of the First Crusade would certainly be able to identify in this short résumé resonances of several key incidents of the years 1096–1098. Of course, the poet simplifies causality of events, ignores real reasons behind tensions in Constantinople that are mentioned in the chronicles, exaggerates and makes many changes whose enumeration here would be an unnecessary diversion. Nevertheless, he maintains the negative representation of the Byzantine emperor and repeats the accusations of treachery in the same context as in the historiography, where the key points of tension were also the oaths taken in the capital and Alexios's retreat.

So far it would seem that instead of arguing for a more positive representation of Byzantium in fiction I have proven the opposite. However, the wickedness of the emperor constitutes only a part of the whole picture. The *Chanson d'Antioche* also offers an alternative model of representation personalised in the emperor's nephew Estatin l'Esnasé who bears the eloquent epithet "of a lion's heart".<sup>24</sup> His profile is mostly based on his actions that are evidence for courage, justice and devotion to the holy undertaking of the Western knights. It is he, who provides for the crusaders' well-being during their passage through Byzantine territory and who, ready to revolt against his liege, advocates the pilgrims' case in front of the emperor. Sharing the crusaders' ups and downs, Estatin accompanies them at the head of his Greek troops as far as Antioch and joins the siege. The poet lists his name several times in the company of the most important crusading leaders as, for example, in the case of the siege of Nicaea: "I can tell you the names of the best ones there. Godfrey of Bouillon set up the camp first and after him Tancred next to Bohemond, Estatin l'Esnasé, who had a heart of lion..."<sup>25</sup>

The character of Estatin has a special function in the poem's conception. He is an antithesis as well as the chief critic of his uncle's behaviour. On the one hand there is the perfidious emperor who obstructs the crusade and makes the army starve, on the other hand there is the villain's nephew, who provides necessities and marches to Syria. On the one hand, the emperor

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, cclxxxv–cclxxxvii, p. 756–762.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv, v. 1158, p. 278, cxxxiii, v. 2921, p. 420: "qui cuer ot de lion".

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv, v. 1155–1158, p. 278: "Des mellors qui la furent vos sai dire lor non : / Premerains se loga Godefrois de Buillon / Et après lui Tangrés dejoste Buimon, / Estatins l'Esnasé, qui cuer ot de lion".



flees from Asia Minor, on the other, Estatin fights on. Moreover, it is through Estatin's speech that the Byzantine ruler is cursed and most sharply accused of treachery:

By my faith, Emperor, I will not fail to tell you: cursed be the treachery and the one who agrees with it. You asked the Franks for force and aid so that they would come to your fortified city. You would provide them with ships to cross the Arm of Saint George<sup>26</sup> and now when they have come you deprive them of their lives.<sup>27</sup>

It seems as if at a certain level of the development of the tradition about Antioch the character of Estatin came to represent a Western idea of how the Byzantines should have behaved during the First Crusade. But in assuming such an intention are we not projecting on the author our own idea of the Latins' perception of Byzantium? It is very probable that the opposition of the emperor and Estatin characters was deliberate, but this could also be explained purely in a literary context. Estatin would be then only a poetic instrument for highlighting emperor's personal faults by showing them in contrast with a rightful hero, which does not necessarily mean that the author had in mind a broader context of the Byzantine role during the crusade.

Whatever the case, we see here a parallel positive pattern of representation of Byzantium that directly contradicts and softens the usual cowardly-perfidious stereotype. Even more interesting is the fact that the Estatin character was inspired by a real-life person, the Byzantine general Tatikios who is known for having a cut-off nose – whence the epithet *l'Esnasé* (i.e. without a nose). Tatikios actually accompanied the First Crusade with the Byzantine army to Antioch according to the terms of agreement sealed between the Western barons and Alexios in Constantinople, but he withdrew from the hopeless-looking siege and became an object of grave criticism of the Latin chroniclers.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is particularly significant that the *chanson* transformed this person's image despite an existing historical tradition into an unequivocally

<sup>26</sup> The Bosphorus

<sup>27</sup> *La chanson d'Antioche*, *op. cit.*, xxxix, v. 950-955, p. 260-262: "Par ma foi, emperere, ne lairai ne vos die, / Dehait ait traïsons et avec qui l'otrie ! / Vos mandastes François por force et por aïe, / Que venissent a vos par vo cité garnie, / Par mi le Brac-Saint-Jorge lor liverriés navie, / Et il i sont venu, or lor tolés la vie !" See also xl, v. 971-975, p. 262-264.

<sup>28</sup> John France, "The Departure of Tatikios from the Crusader Army", *Historical Research*, 110, 1971, p. 137-140. As well as providing necessary logistics and military support the general was there to secure Byzantine control over newly recovered former imperial territories.

positive hero. Such a transformation points strongly to fiction's tendency towards more positive depiction of Byzantium.

The *Chanson d'Antioche* is not a singular example of a literary design with two contrasting patterns of representation. A similar situation occurs in the romance *Cligès* and in the context of a particular motif from the story that speaks of two Byzantine heroes, Cligès and his father Alexander, who travel to King Arthur's Britain in pursuit of glory and honour. An echo of Byzantium's negative reputation can be seen at the figure of Alexander's younger brother Alis, who subsequently disrespects the hereditary rights of both the main heroes. Especially appalling is an inexcusable breach of the oath according to which he was obliged not to take a wife so that Cligès would remain his only legitimate successor.<sup>29</sup> Byzantium's image, however, does not seem to suffer much damage thanks to highly positive representation of Alexander and Cligès, both valiant and courteous knights, that outbalances Alis's faults. Both characters occupy central position in the plot, therefore, logically, more space is dedicated to proofs of their all-round virtue than to vices of their relative. In consequence, the text appears to present a favourable image of the Byzantines from which Alis is only an exception.

### *Vindication of deceitful behaviour*

While the negative stereotype in the *Chanson d'Antioche* was still considerable in spite of soothing presence of the hero Estatin, the following section shall introduce a source that gives a markedly different image of Byzantium and documents another specific way in which medieval fiction used to neutralise or even to improve an unfavourable image of the Byzantine character.

The source in question is an anonymous *chanson de geste* entitled *Girart de Roussillon*. Unlike the *Antioche* this poem does not have a close link with any "serious" historical account, nor do we have any indication of its authorship. It can be dated to a wide period of 1136–1180,<sup>30</sup> although the attempt of

<sup>29</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, *op. cit.*, v. 2615–2678, p. 93–95, v. 6549–6558, p. 236. These episodes are said to have been inspired by circumstances surrounding the accession of Manuel I Komnenos who took possession of the imperial throne instead of his older brother Isaac. Introduction to Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. William W. Kibler and Carleton W. Carroll, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p. 7; Anthime Fourier, *Le couraant réaliste dans le roman courtois en France au moyen âge*, t. I, Paris, A. G. Nizet, 1960, p. 165–166. When read against the background of Capetian France this particular interest in hereditary rights of the elder might reflect on Capetians' efforts to secure primogeniture.

<sup>30</sup> Introduction to *La chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; W. Mary Hackett, *Girart De Roussillon : chanson de geste*, t. III, Paris, Picard, 1955, p. 478.

Robert Lafont to offer a precise date suggests that the preserved version might have derived from two different songs, one coming from approximately 1115, and the other from around 1145.<sup>31</sup>

In general, Byzantium's role in this text is not very prominent, but it plays a crucial role in the story's plot which revolves around a double marriage between the Frankish king Charles, his vassal Girart and two daughters of the Byzantine emperor, Elissent and Berthe respectively. A greater part of the poem is dedicated to events of civil war unleashed by the two men, but the Greek princesses play a crucial part in the eventual reconciliation of their husbands in the last third of the story.

The text does not abound in direct notions of perfidy, arrogance or cowardice. Nevertheless, some such negative characteristics might appear to be implied by very actions of the Byzantine protagonists. It could be argued that this is true especially for the representation of the younger of the two sisters, Elissent. Thus throughout the story both women are portrayed in a favourable light and characterized in most flattering terms. They share immense beauty, noble bearing, good sense and courtliness, to name but just a few of their qualities.<sup>32</sup> Yet when it comes to individual traits, Elissent stands out for attractiveness and charm as well as cleverness and it is precisely this last trait that might evoke the stereotype of Byzantine duplicity. We read in *laisses* DXLVII-DLI (p. 590-596) that Elissent makes use of clever speech, trickery and even an outward lie (a made-up prophetic dream about the count's return from exile) in order to persuade her husband the king to grant Girart his mercy. This initiative earns her Charles's reproach and an unflattering epithet "cheat" or "deceiver".<sup>33</sup>

Yet, the reason why we cannot make an enticing parallel between this episode and the stereotype of Greek trickery and perfidy of the chronicles is that Elissent's deeds were done in the name of greater good that is for the peace of her new Frankish homeland. As Micheline de Combarieu has asserted: "The portrait of Elissent that is outlined to us is that of an ideal king as opposed to Charles who is its antithesis".<sup>34</sup> Elissent represents wisdom and good

<sup>31</sup> Robert Lafont, "Girart de Roussillon: un texte Occitan", In: *De l'aventure épique à romanesque: Hommage à André de Mandach*, Bern, Peter Lang, 1997, p. 33-34.

<sup>32</sup> See for example, *La chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, *op. cit.*, xix, v. 232-241, p. 58, xx, v. 258-261, p. 60.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, dxlix, v. 7971, p. 594: "enjaneris".

<sup>34</sup> Micheline de Combarieu, "Le personnage d'Elissent dans *Girart de Roussillon*", *Studia Occitanica: in memoriam Paul Remy*, t. II, eds. Hans-Erich Keller et al., Kalamazoo,

judgement while Charles persists in his blind pride and jealousy. Thus the would-be deceit against the king is vindicated as beneficial for the main hero – as it was intended to reconcile the valiant count Girart with the crown – and ultimately for the Frankish empire as a whole, since their reconciliation would stop the destructive internal war.

The motif of the justification of guile in *Girart de Roussillon* is not unique. Another epic originating in twelfth-century France known under the name *Macario* or the *Reine Sebile* follows the same pattern. The anonymous work tells a complicated story of a Franco-Byzantine war caused by Charlemagne who unjustly banished his virtuous wife of Byzantine descent. According to the key passage, the Eastern emperor conceals that his repudiated daughter is safe and sound in Constantinople, thereby inventing a pretext for a punitive campaign. Interestingly, this action is not depicted as an evil and perfidious deed but as an understandable reaction to dishonour he had suffered. Symptomatically, even the Frankish party itself has to admit that “He [the emperor] is right, we are wrong”.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, the earliest coherent version of this *chanson de geste* has been preserved only in a fourteenth-century Franco-Italian manuscript and all that remains of the original Old French line are three short fragments from the thirteenth century that do not include the episode mentioned above.<sup>36</sup> Its evidence is, therefore, only of a tertiary value and somewhat unreliable.

This is not the case with another exemplary passage from *Partonopeus de Blois*, which has been firmly documented in the version closest to the original as well as in other manuscripts of the Old French tradition. To be brief, the passage speaks of a scheme made up by two Byzantine ladies Uraque and Persewis with the good intention of bringing together the leading couple of

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Michigan, Medieval Institute Publications, 1986, p. 30: “Le portrait qui nous est tracé d’elle est celui d’un roi idéal, face à Charles qui en est l’antithèse.” This might be an example of a relatively frequent literary motif when a poet makes use of a usually inferior character (in this case a woman) to set a mirror to the failings of a formally superior protagonists (male and a king).

<sup>35</sup> *Macaire*, *op. cit.*, v. 2042, p. 172: “El a li droito, e nu torto avon”.

<sup>36</sup> Some researchers replace the lost original with 15<sup>th</sup>-century Old Spanish version (so called *Cuento*) since its parts overlap with the Old French fragments. The comparison of *Cuento* with the Franco-Italian manuscript can be found in Leslie Zarker Morgan, “The *Reine Sibille* / *Macario* Story and the Charlemagne Cycle Throughout Europe: a Re-Examination of the Franco-Italian *Macario*”, *Italica*, 1, 2001, p. 1-17. However, at the current state of material base it is impossible to determine the extent to which the Franco-Italian tradition altered the Byzantine portrayal in the French original.

the storyline. The whole “conspiracy” is passed over with the following commentary: “They will be forgiven because they lied for a good cause”.<sup>37</sup>

All in all, these three examples illustrate that a seemingly perfidious deed committed by a Byzantine character need not have a negative effect on their overall image. Moreover, the tricks used by Elissent in the *Girart de Roussillon* or Urraque and Persewis in *Partonopeus* are not exclusive for our sample of texts. The same motif was used by poets in works without any relation to Byzantine material<sup>38</sup> and we would be very mistaken if we held it for a manifestation or even a remote reflection of traditional Byzantine clichés.

### *Dominance of magical and exotic aspect*

It has been already hinted that the theme of Byzantine exoticism, though equally common in fiction as in historiography, acquired a new quality in the former as it got rid of any negative connotations and was often enriched by a supernatural aspect. Now is the time to have a closer look at the role of these alterations in construction of the image of the East.

The first poem that comes to mind when speaking of magical features of Byzantium is the anonymous romance *Partonopeus de Blois*. It must have been written sometime in the period 1150–1188; most recent works suggest a date at the turn of the sixth and seventh decades of the twelfth century.<sup>39</sup> The title itself suggests that the author and his work were connected to the house of Blois-Champagne and judging from the number of preserved manuscripts it must have enjoyed a popularity comparable to that of Chrétien de Troyes.<sup>40</sup> There are two main families discernible among the manuscripts that differ in certain aspects of the plot. The version currently regarded as the oldest<sup>41</sup> tells a story of a young count of Blois Partonopeus who is unexpectedly brought to Byzantium by a magical ship sent by the empress Melior. She makes him

<sup>37</sup> *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, op. cit., v. 6289–6290, p. 404: “Eles en evront bon pardon, / car ne mentent se por bien non.”

<sup>38</sup> Compare for example damsel Lunete’s strategic design of reconciliation of the main hero with his wife in Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain*. P. Eley – P. Simons, “*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes: a Re-Assessment”, *Romania*, 117, 1999, p. 316–341, p. 332–337.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. arguments of P. Eley – P. Simons, “*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes”, art. cit., p. 316–341, p. 318–324.

<sup>40</sup> A. Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste...*, op. cit., p. 397; Introduction to *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, op. cit., p. 12; P. Eley – P. Simons, “*Partonopeus de Blois* and Chrétien de Troyes”, art. cit., p. 324 ff.

<sup>41</sup> Ms. A (Paris, Arsenal, 2986), Introduction to *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, op. cit., p. 51–53.

her lover on the condition that he will not try to see her nor seek to discover her identity for two years (until he reaches the age to marry and to rule over the Empire). Partonopeus's betrayal of the promise leads to a long sequence of hardships that are eventually overcome and a triple wedding unites the two main heroes, Melior's sister Uraque with the French king and a noble lady Persewis with Partonopeus's friend Gaudin.

The specificity of the romance consists in an extreme emphasis on the representation of the Byzantine Empire as an isolated realm of supernatural and fantasy. There are self-navigating ships that transport Partonopeus between the mundane world of medieval France and the mysterious Byzantine city of Chef d'Oire, there are invisible servants, supernaturally gifted animals, a giant and, of course, ubiquitous splendour. Even the Byzantine empress Melior herself disposes of magical powers, which come – and this is important – from God, not from some evil source.<sup>42</sup> Apparently, this kind of representation reaches far beyond the chroniclers' astonishment vis à vis Byzantine splendour. The magical and magical-like aspect of the Empire is present also in other pieces of twelfth-century fiction (the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, *Cligès* and *Girart de Roussillon*), although usually not as ostensibly.<sup>43</sup> Generally, *chansons de geste* are more sober with regard to supernatural elements than courtly romances but do not fail to emphasize Byzantine riches, luxury and power. An obvious conclusion links this phenomenon with the characteristics of the romance genre that take delight in fantastic plots and with fiction that allows authors to bend reality according to their desires.

However it is not only the greater extent to which fiction explores the exotic and magical motif with regard to Byzantium that distinguishes it from crusading chronicles. It is also the dominance of these features over any other aspects of representation that may portray Byzantium in a negative light. The complete *Partonopeus* romance is not the best example to illustrate this point given its actual lack of unfavourable depiction of Byzantium. Throughout the whole oeuvre Melior is described either as a mysterious fairy-like figure or as a generous, pious, powerful and loyal lady.<sup>44</sup> Similarly positive

<sup>42</sup> *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, op. cit., v. 4640, p. 316. At v. 3935-3936 (p. 280) Partonopeus's mother accuses Melior of witchcraft, but she is proven wrong. Since the accusation is pronounced by a villainous character, Melior's reputation does not suffer.

<sup>43</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, op. cit., xx-xxii, p. 44-48; Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, op. cit., v. 5533-5619, p. 199-202; *La chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, op. cit., xviii, v. 212-222, p. 56.

<sup>44</sup> *Le roman de Partonopeu de Blois*, op. cit., v. 4427-4446, p. 304-306, v. 4951, p. 332, v. 7065-7078, p. 446.

terms apply to the rest of Byzantine protagonists. In contrast a more suitable source for the argument about the balance of positive and negative is a curious *chanson de geste* named the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*, which includes several critical representations of the Eastern emperor.<sup>45</sup>

In comparison with other works of the genre the *Pèlerinage* has a distinctly humorous colouring that causes problems with the poem's generic classification. Its origins most probably stretch back to the second half of the twelfth century – a date which supports theories that see this work as a parody of the Second Crusade (1147–1149).<sup>46</sup> The plot unfolds from the audacious words of the Frankish queen addressed to her husband Charles the Great: “Yet I know someone who is more graceful [than you] when he wears his crown in the middle of his knights [...] This man [the Byzantine king (sic)] is richer in possessions, gold and money, but he is not so valiant nor such a brave knight with regard to striking in combat or pursuit [of an enemy].”<sup>47</sup> Wishing to disprove this statement, Charlemagne sets out to meet Byzantine king Hugo in Constantinople. The central part of the narrative consists of a series of trials that eventuate in recognition of the superiority of the former over the latter and Hugo's homage to the French king.<sup>48</sup>

At two instances the text shows similarities with the negative stereotype of chronicles. Firstly, the cited extract suggests that the Byzantine ruler somehow lacks bravery and military values, at least in comparison with his

<sup>45</sup> The text's representation of Byzantium has been already treated in Marc Carrier's *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades* (op. cit.). My analysis presented here mostly confirms his findings.

<sup>46</sup> M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades*..., op. cit., p. 320–321. Another more tangible and widely accepted inspiration of the work is a Latin account of Charlemagne's journey to the East and his translation of holy relics acquired there to the Abbey of Saint Denis, which is known by the abridged title *Descriptio qualiter*. Anne Latowsky, “Charlemagne as Pilgrim? Requests for Relics in the *Descriptio Qualiter* and the *Voyage of Charlemagne*”, In: *The Legend of Charlemagne in the Middle Ages: Power, Faith, and Crusade*, eds. Matthew Gabriele – Jace Stuckey, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 154.

<sup>47</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, op. cit., i, v. 27–29, p. 30: “Uncore en sa jo un ki plus se fait leger, / Quant il porte corune entre ses chevalers. [...] Plus est riche de aver, d'or e de deners, / Mais n'est mie si pruz ni si bon chevalers / Pur ferir en bataille ne pur encaucer”.

<sup>48</sup> It is apparent that the story would provide a fascinating material for a study of Western political claims with regard to the Eastern Empire. Some aspects of this problem have been discussed in: Finn E. Sinclair, “Conquering Constantinople: Text, Territory and Desire”, In: *Eastern voyages, Western visions: French writing and painting of the Orient*, ed. Margaret Topping, Berne, Peter Lang, 2004, 47–68; E. Jane Burns, “Portraits of Kingship in the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne*”, *Olifant*, 10, 1984–1985, p. 161–181.

Western counterpart. The author, however, does not elaborate on the idea. Therefore, strictly speaking, it would be imprecise to read that Hugo is not valiant and courageous since he might possess these qualities but simply to a lesser degree than Charlemagne. Secondly, after the arrival of Charlemagne and his retinue in Constantinople we learn that King Hugo, “wise, clever and full of cunning”,<sup>49</sup> set a spy to his guests’ chamber – an act that is subsequently branded as “treachery”.<sup>50</sup>

Now, is there a way to argue against such resolute negative assertion? There is no alternative positive model of the kind Estatin l’Esnasé provided for the *Chanson d’Antioche* and a motive behind Hugo’s act can hardly pass for a *bona fide* initiative. Still, as Carrier has concluded on basis of a different research, the epic’s overall impression of Byzantium is not that of the perfidy or cowardice hinted at in the first quote.<sup>51</sup> The image that dominates in reader’s mind and attracts his attention is based on scenes like the one in the *laisse* XXI describing splendour and supernatural features of Constantinopolitan palace:

Seven thousand knights were seated there, wearing cloaks of ermine and tunics of Persian silk [...] the tables, the chairs, and the benches were of pure gold. Decorated in blue, the palace was delightful with its fine paintings of beasts and serpents and a multitude of creatures and birds in flight. Constructed with skill and nobly secured, it was vaulted and completely covered over. [...] There was a sculpture in copper and metal of two children who carried in their mouths horns of white ivory. If any wind, blowing from the sea, struck the palace on the west side, it would make the palace revolve repeatedly, like a chariot’s wheel as it rolls earthwards. Their horns blared and bellowed and thundered, just like a drum or a clap of thunder or the tolling of a huge suspended bell.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, *op. cit.*, xxiv, v. 438, p. 50: “Sages fud e membrez, plains de maleviz...”. Trans. Burgess.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, xliii, v. 689, p. 62: “felunie”.

<sup>51</sup> M. Carrier, *L’Autre à l’époque des croisades...*, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>52</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, *op. cit.*, xx, v. 336-359, p. 44-46: “Set mil chevalers i troverent seant, / A peliçuns ermins, blianz escarimant. [...] A or fin sunt les tables, les chaeres e li banc. / Li paleis fu listez de azur e avenant / Par cheres peintures a bestes e a serpenz, / A tutes creatures e oiseaus volanz. / Li paleis fud vout e desur cloanz, / E fu fait par cumpas e serét noblement, [...] Dequivre e de metal tregeté douz enanz : / Cascun tient en sa bouche un corn d’ivorie blanc. / Si galarne ist de mer, bise ne altre vent, / Ki ferent al paleis devers occident, / Il le funt turner e menut e suvent, / Cumme roe de char qui a tere decent”. Trans. G. Burgess.



It would be otiose to list every scene that pictures the magical phenomena, grandeur and elegance of Hugo's court, the exotic splendour of his possessions, or the generosity and sophistication of his character. One can compare, for instance, the passage on Charlemagne's first meeting with the king seated on a fantastic golden plough, or his awe in face of the magnificence of the palace and the riches of a welcoming banquet.<sup>53</sup> The examples are so numerous that an isolated allusion to perfidy and an unclear hint of cowardice seem to get lost in their midst. The *Pèlerinage* definitely exposes fiction's ability to overshadow negatives with accentuated magical and exotic references. On the other hand, taking into account the particular satirical nature of the source,<sup>54</sup> one hesitates before pronouncing that this poem offers an unswervingly positive portrayal of the Byzantine world. Nonetheless, I am inclined, with certain reserve, to do so, seeing that on certain occasions the Byzantine sovereign appears to be more virtuous than Charlemagne and his suite, whose final victory has more to do with luck than real virtue. Particularly striking is the contrast between Hugo's hospitality and courteousness, and unruly manners of his Frankish guests who get drunk and boast about destroying their host's possessions or seducing his daughter. When they are prompted to fulfil these indecent and foolish declarations, the Franks succeed only thanks to God's intervention brought by Holy relics that Charlemagne has received (again without credit on his side) in Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup> The problem is that occasions like this one reflect positively on Hugo only secondarily by mocking or criticising his opponent and are not explicit enough about his virtues other than those connected to wealth and courtliness. So it seems that the hesitation when interpreting Byzantine image in the *Pèlerinage* has its roots not only in the perplexed satirical nature of the oeuvre but also in a scarcity of some motifs that are crucial for creating of a clearly positive impression.

### *Westernization of Byzantine heroes*

To develop and do justice to the idea hinted at in the last lines of the previous section it is vital to discuss a technique that not only suppressed or excused sporadic negative elements, but which actually formed the essence of a positive

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii-xix, p. 42-44, xx, v. 362-363, p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> The satire is directed at both Hugo, as well as Charlemagne with his entourage. M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, *op. cit.*, p. 323-324; A. Latowsky, "Charlemagne as Pilgrim?", *art. cit.*, p. 160-161.

<sup>55</sup> *The Pilgrimage of Charlemagne*, *op. cit.*, xviii, xxii-xxv, xli. See also A. Latowsky, "Charlemagne as Pilgrim?", *art. cit.*, p. 155, 163; E. J. Burns, "Portraits of Kingship...", *art. cit.*, p. 168.

representation of Byzantine character. So that we may continue with our discussion, we must firstly answer a fundamental question – what does “positive” actually mean in medieval French fiction? Basically, it means “having qualities attractive for a reader” but also “being in accord with a Western value system”, of which fiction was the main mirror and on which it based its topos of a hero. Plus, it is equally important to realise that the worth of every fictional protagonist is measured according to their relationship to the main hero of the story.

Surely, qualities associated with foreign exoticism like riches, refinement or the unusual erudition of Byzantine women (e.g. Melior in *Partonopeus*) had positive connotations depending on a particular situation. But the analysis of our sample indicates that to create an unequivocally positive character another element was needed. It was necessary to adjust them to a predetermined Western topos of laudable behaviour. One may bring to mind the courage of Estatin l’Esnasé, the beauty, loyalty, courtliness and nobleness of female characters in *Girart*, *Macario*, and *Partonopeus*, or the wisdom, power and courtly standard of Byzantine emperors in most of the poems. Yet, nowhere is this “westernization” of Byzantine characters more evident than in the case of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Cligès*.

Chrétien de Troyes, the famous twelfth-century pioneer of the Arthurian romance genre from the region of Champagne does not require a long introduction. *Cligès*, the second of his preserved works, was written probably in the year 1176. The unusually precise date has been determined with the help of numerous historical references to the years 1170–1176 identified in the plot.<sup>56</sup> This suggests that the poet was well acquainted with his Byzantine material, which certainly included the stereotypical picture of treachery and

<sup>56</sup> To begin with, the romance’s emperor of Constantinople, emperor of Germany and duke of Saxony are usually identified with Manuel I Komnenos, Frederick I Barbarossa and Duke Henry the Lion. The conflict of the latter two, which resulted in the duke’s refusal to help with Frederick’s Italian campaign that ended in a disastrous defeat at Legnano (1176), found an echo in a relationship between the fictional characters as well. Secondly, the imagined marriage union between emperor Alis and daughter of the German ruler Fénice is thought to be a reversed reflection of a planned betrothment between Manuel’s daughter Maria and Barbarossa’s son Henry negotiated in Cologne in 1171. It is equally in Cologne that Alis meets his future wife in *Cligès*. Other parallels include, for example, circumstances of Manuel’s and Alis’s accession to the throne or geographic setting of certain events. The idea of 1176 dating originated with A. Fourrier (*Le courant réaliste...*, *op. cit.*, p. 160–178), but is generally repeated by other authors; cf. Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, éd. Laurence Harf-Lancner, Paris, Champion, 2006, p. 10–11; Introduction to Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, *op. cit.*, p. 7–8. C. Luttrell, however, presumes later dating (1185–1187) on the basis of literary analysis. Introduction to Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

effeminacy. Knowledge of Byzantine realia and Western accusations may play a role in the image of Emperor Alis which we discussed earlier. But let us leave the question of the text's historical inspirations to one side and concentrate instead on the portrayal of the two main characters, Cligès and his father Alexander.

These two Byzantines have nothing of the magical and distinctly foreign aura typical for *Partonopeus's* Melior or the emperor figures in the *Pèlerinage* and *Girart*. Instead, they are prototypes of valorous Western knights who do not differ from the heroes of other romances of purely Western settings unless by an emphasis on their generosity (picking up the topos of Byzantine wealth).<sup>57</sup> First and foremost, they are said to have an abundance of prowess, which in itself implies also nobility and bravery. Secondly, they are most courteous according to the specific meaning of the Old French term "courtoisie". Thirdly, travelling to Arthur's court and engaging in dangerous combats, whether in Britain or in Germany, they seek honour that cannot exist separately from the former virtues and achieve it through many heroic deeds, mainly the deeds of arms. Naturally, such good knights must also be incredibly handsome and strong, not to mention generous.<sup>58</sup> And finally, Chrétien specifically states that Alexander is "free from arrogance and impetuousness".<sup>59</sup>

On the one hand this list corresponds precisely with a basic definition of the Western ideal of knighthood that is a central theme of courtly romance.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand it is in absolute contradiction with the Byzantine qualities criticized by contemporary Latin historians. In this context it should be noted that the negative portrayal of Byzantine character in the chronicles originally derived from Byzantium's incompatibility with this Western ideal and value system. And here is the key to the main difference between historiography and imaginative literature. Fiction, with its black-and-white interpretation of the world, simply made up an ideal Byzantine who would fit in the paradigm of the system.

<sup>57</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, *op. cit.*, v. 402-421, p. 14-15. Alternatively a very distant echo of the Greek craftiness could be seen in Alexander's as well as Cligès's use of disguise in combat against an enemy that might be an allusion to the Trojan horse, though the scenes concerned serve to testify to the knights' wits rather than trickery. *Ibid.*, v. 1814-1837, p. 64-65, v. 3482-3503, p. 124-5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 65, p. 3, v. 897-902, p. 31-32, v. 2766-2767, p. 98, v. 2964-2966, p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 333, p. 11: "sanz orguel et sanz desroi".

<sup>60</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: the representation of reality in western literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2013 (first published 1946), p. 131: "A self-portrayal of feudal knighthood with its mores and ideals is the fundamental purpose of the courtly romance".

While in the majority of cases nothing indicates that the authors westernized their Byzantine characters with any special intention, except to keep in line with standardized types of fictional heroes, there is something special about *Cligès* that suggests more conscious and deliberate initiative. This is best illustrated by several extracts from the poem. Alexander's speech, verses 146-165:

I do not have enough virtue so that I could bear arms yet. Nobody can dissuade me, whether by pleading or flattery, from going to that foreign land to see the king [Arthur] and his barons, whose courtesy and prowess are of so great renown. Many high-ranking men through idleness loose the great glory they could have, if they travelled through the world. Idleness and glory do not go well together, it seems to me; a rich man who rests all day does nothing to earn himself praise. Worthiness is a burden to a wicked man and wickedness is a burden to a worthy one: thus they are contrary and opposed. And he who spends all days amassing and multiplying wealth is a slave to it.<sup>61</sup>

At another place Chrétien stresses the Byzantine emperor's obligation to fulfil his boon and to let his son Alexander leave Constantinople in pursuit of glory "because an emperor must not lie".<sup>62</sup> And later on the author asserts that *Cligès* "never wished to belong among the cowardly or weak".<sup>63</sup> These and similar quotations put an extraordinary emphasis on negating exactly those character flaws that are traditionally associated with Byzantium such as indolence, flattery, deception, lack of courage. Could it be that the author, aware of historians' accusations, intended to set up an example by presenting Byzantines as they should be – valorous, honourable, strong with martial spirit, generously sharing, not only amassing wealth they did not merit by actions? Or did he try to oppose a prevailing anti-Greek prejudice? A definite answer to these speculative questions is a utopia. We might recall similar

<sup>61</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligès*, *op. cit.*, v. 146-165, p. 5-6: "N'ai pas ancor si grant vertu / Que je poïsse armes porter. / Nus ne m'an porroit enorter, / Par proiere ne par losange, / Que je n'aille an la terre estrange / Veoir le roi et ses barons / De cui si granz est li renons / De cortisie et de proësse. / Maint haut home par lor peresce / Perdent grant los que il porroient / Avoir se par le monde erroient. / Ne s'acordent pas bien ansamble / Repos et los, si con moi sanble, / Car de nule rien ne s'alose / Riches hom qui toz jorz repose. / Proësse est fes a lavés home, / Et a preu est malvestiez some : / Ensi sont contraire et divers. / Et cil est a son avoir sers / Qui toz jorz l'amasse et acroist".

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 178, p. 6: "Qu'ampereres ne doit mantir".

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3456-3457, p. 123-124: "Qui ainz ne vost appartenir / A recreant ne a faille". Trans. Kibler.

speculations concerning the role of Estatin l'Esnasé in the *Chanson d'Antioche*. Neither there were we able to resolve the problem of author's intention with complete satisfaction. All that can be plausibly said about both works is that their authors stressed the opposition of positive portrayal of some Byzantine characters and faulty behaviour of others – whether it be a Byzantine emperor or the unnamed men who “through idleness loose the great glory they could have” – in the way that does not seem coincidental.

### *Special case of the works of Gautier d'Arras*

Finally, in order to complete a picture of French fiction's approach towards Byzantium in the twelfth century it is necessary to consider two final sources, products of the same author, a contemporary and competitor of Chrétien, Gautier d'Arras. The poet, of whom we can assume that he came from a clerical milieu, wrote for the region of Champagne and probably had a link to the town of Provins.<sup>64</sup> Both Gautier's romances are, each in a different way, odd items in our sample, therefore, they deserve to be treated in a separate section.

*Eracle*, a story modelled upon a legend of the seventh-century Byzantine emperor Herakleios that had been transmitted to the Latin tradition from the East, takes chronological priority. Despite an abundance of theories nothing definitive can be said about its dating except a wide range 1159–1184. There are three discernible parts of the plot with attributes of three different genres, hagiography, romance and *chanson de geste*, that follow the life of Eracle-Herakleios from his conception and childhood in Rome, through his achievements in the service of the Roman emperor, to his acquiring of the Byzantine throne and the recovery of the Holy Cross from the Persian king Chosroes.

Eracle would be a proof *par excellence* of a wholly positive image of the Byzantine character and it would be difficult to choose from the number of citations that highlight his knightly as well as saintly virtues, were it not for one essential fact. According to Gautier, the fictional Eracle was born in the West to Western parents and without any connection to the Byzantine world at all. Taking this figure as an example of the representation of Byzantium would be possible only on the assumption that already in the twelfth century there existed a strong sense of connection between Herakleios and the contemporary Constantinopolitan Empire so that the French public would be able to associate this protagonist with Byzantium. But as has been already stated

<sup>64</sup> Introduction to Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, *op. cit.*, p. xi-xiii; Corinne Pierreville, *Gautier d'Arras : L'autre chrétien*, Paris, Champion, 2001, p. 15.

by Marc Carrier, the Eastern emperors ruling before Charlemagne's *translatio* were probably still regarded as Romans, not exclusively Greek.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, we cannot draw any conclusions concerning the representation of Byzantium from the portrayal of Eracle himself and the contribution of the romance to our discussion is reduced to occasional passages about Eracle's Greek subjects. Nor are these of much help. The author indeed bases the image of the Greeks on religious criteria and calls them, as a rule, "Christians" (in contrast with pagan Persians) or "our people".<sup>66</sup> This Christianity and relationship to the main hero put the anonymous mass of Eracle's Eastern subjects on the side of "good", even though the poet does not characterise them in any other praise-worthy terms apart from a very short comment about the emperor's "brave and combative men".<sup>67</sup> The implied positive impression is also supported by an absence of negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, in the end we still stand on uncertain ground since we cannot be sure how a twelfth-century audience would perceive the identity of this group or whether it would interpret it in the context of the twelfth century or in the context of Herakleios's own era.

Even before he finished *Eracle* it seems that Gautier had embarked upon a new Byzantine-related project, the romance *Ille et Galeron*. The editor of this text, Penny Eley assumes that Gautier himself might have made two versions of the work. The first one would have been written between 1167 and 1184, the revision before 1191, according to an argument based on dedicatory formulas to the empress Beatrice (1156–1184, crowned 1167) and count Thibaut V of Blois (1151–1191).<sup>68</sup> A substantial part of the romance's plot is linked to the territory of Brittany – the homeland of the main hero Ille – and is of no concern to the present study. Nevertheless, in the course of events Ille becomes the seneschal of an old Roman emperor. Byzantium's function in the plot is then that of the enemy of the Roman armies under Ille's command in two armed conflicts that, naturally, end in a great victory of the West.

The romance is unique among the fictional narratives as it is the only text to portray the East in terms comparable to the representational frame of the chronicles. Gautier does not stint on offensive adjectives applied to the Byzantines and their emperor whom he identifies as the chief villain of his story. The vocabulary used includes accusations of treachery, arrogance

<sup>65</sup> M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, *op. cit.*, p. 322, n. 1047.

<sup>66</sup> See for example v. 4253–4254, p. 162, v. 5485, p. 164.

<sup>67</sup> Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, *op. cit.*, v. 5402, p. 162.

<sup>68</sup> Introduction to Gautier d'Arras, *Ille et Galeron*, *op. cit.*, p. xiii–xix; The theory was more recently supported also by Karen Pratt, Introduction to Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, *op. cit.*, p. x.

and villainy. The Greeks are even called “the traitors, the enemies of God”.<sup>69</sup> Despite initial references to the power and martial experience of the Byzantine army this representation gives way to implications of cowardice and lack of virility during the second Byzantine-Roman war, which culminated in the flight of Byzantine aggressors:

The Greeks had turned tail; I do not believe there were three men, or even two, amongst all the Greeks, bold enough to dare to turn back and face them [Ille's troops]: they all turned and fled together [...] The emperor did not waste any time, there was no joy or amusement for him now: he crossed the sea close to a port, and when once he was on another shore, he did not fear any man alive.<sup>70</sup>

The ruler is additionally known for his violence and lack of chivalry that could not be offset, not even by the riches of Constantinople. At least, not in the eyes of a Roman princess who categorically refuses to marry this “wicked man on account of his wealth”.<sup>71</sup>

Occasional positive comments about Byzantine martial force, the nobility of particular Greek fighters and the wealth of Constantinople<sup>72</sup> cannot possibly counterbalance the number of purely negative images. In vain would we look for a Byzantine character who could improve the fractured reputation of his compatriots? Unlike the Byzantine emperor in *Macario*, who had a just reason for waging a war against Charlemagne; the Byzantine sovereign in Gautier's narrative was motivated to attack his neighbour by selfish territorial aspirations and there is no excuse for his deeds. We cannot but conclude that Gautier, for some reason, did not follow the same path as the other poets and although his *Ille et Galeron* has much less to do with history than the *Chanson d'Antioche* or *Eracle*, as far as the representation of Byzantium is concerned, it matches the criticising tendencies of crusading chronicles.

<sup>69</sup> Gautier d'Arras, *Ille et Galeron*, op. cit., v. 5876, p. 198: “Li felon, li Diu anemi”.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 6051-6062, p. 204: “Li Griu lor ont torné les dos ; / Je n'i quic mie trois si os / En tos les Grius, non mie .ii., / qui s'ost retorner devers eus : / En fuies tornent tot ensanle. [...] Li empereres ne s'oublie, / Or n'a il joie ne deport : / Passer se fait endroit un port, / Et puis qu'il est a autre rive, / Il ne crient nul home qui vive”. Trans. P. Eley.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 6221, p. 208: “Signor, cuidiés que je covoit / Un malvais home por avoir”.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 2101-2105, p. 70, v. 2545, p. 86, v. 2561, p. 86, 5975-5978, p. 200, v. 6007, p. 203, v. 6221, p. 208.

## Conclusion

To summarise, the evidence of the eight texts analysed in this paper reveals that the image of Byzantium in twelfth-century French fiction fundamentally differs from what we have come to see as a stereotypically ambiguous Western responses to Byzantium: the generally proclaimed ambiguity of elaborate descriptions of Byzantine luxury, exotica and material and sacral wealth on the one hand; and complaints of Byzantine treacheries, dirty tricks and effeminacy in a broad sense of the word on the other. Although fiction might include this ensemble of stereotypes, the majority of the sources deviate from the pattern set by crusading chronicles in their more positive approach, scarcity of criticism and a greater emphasis on Byzantium's oriental and magical attractions. One might question these results on account of possible changes made by later editors of the texts, but to invert the positive tendencies would require more radical modifications to have been made than is plausible. Moreover, even if the thirteenth-century copyists intervened with the portrayal of Byzantium, it is unlikely that they would make the Byzantines sound better than in the twelfth-century original considering the East-West tensions after 1204.

The absence of evidence further demonstrates that fiction, contrary to historiography, did not link Byzantine wealth and exoticism with negative meanings. Also adjectives such as perfidious, effeminate etc. were seldom overtly employed; instead they were more commonly implied in particular scenes and characters' actions. Whatever the case, our analysis has indicated that most of these occurrences were either: 1) excused by good intentions or a just cause as in *Girart*, *Macario*, *Partonopeus*, or 2) overshadowed by prevailing favourable representation of other figures and scenes as in the *Antioche* and *Cligès*, or 3) lost amidst exotic and magical impressions prevalent in the *Pèlerinage* and *Partonopeus*. In the end there remains only one clearly anti-Byzantine text in the sample and that is *Ille et Galeron*. In addition, the *Cligès* romance illustrates the fact that fiction not only suppressed hints of unfavourable stereotypes, but also built genuinely positive depictions of Byzantine characters while adjusting them to the topos of the Western fictional hero. On the one hand this significant conclusion implies that the idea of the treacherous and weak Greeks was not as dogmatic as previous research suggested and that French society had no problem with accepting an image of a virtuous Byzantine. On the other hand, the "westernization" of Eastern characters suggests that the resultant representation of the Byzantines had less to do with the poets' preoccupation with Byzantium itself but rather with



themes from within the Western European context on which their stories were meant to reflect.

To sum up, fiction does not seem to mirror the ambivalent representations found in chronicles. In a way, it is true that general impression of the East in fiction can be sometimes ambiguous, but not necessarily in the same sense. In the *Chanson d'Antioche* we saw polarisation between two characters; in the *Pèlerinage* the ambivalence stemmed from its humorous caricature of all protagonists; and finally, in the case of *Partonopeus de Blois* any ambiguity in the Byzantine portrayal was one inherent in mystery and exoticism, an ambiguity between the attraction to and fear of the unknown.

Having come to these conclusions, there automatically follows the question why? Why is there such a difference between fiction and chronicles? And how to explain the exceptionality of Gautier d'Arras's second romance? Answering the latter question first might help to elucidate the former.

What might immediately spring to mind is the subjectivity of the author determined by individual influences like patronage or region. But as has been said, Gautier was active in the same area (Champagne) as Chrétien de Troyes and dedicated *Ille et Galeron* to Thibaut V count of Blois. It is known that the courts of Champagne and Blois had good relationships with Komnenian dynasty in Constantinople<sup>73</sup> so it is improbable that Gautier's negative image of Byzantium was meant to suit a general Champanois atmosphere. However, *Ille et Galeron* has also another dedication – to Beatrix of Burgundy, wife of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. The empress is mentioned in prologue of both versions of the romance and she must have been the one under whose patronage Gautier began his writing. Thibaut's name appears only in the later version and the author might have added it only at this time. Therefore, we ought to see *Ille et Galeron* rather in the context of the original dedication.

As early as 1960 Anthime Fourrier suggested that the poet drew his inspiration from the strained relationship between Frederick and the Byzantine emperor Manuel I Komnenos during the period 1157–1170 caused by a collision of their interests in Italy. He lists a brief résumé of this rivalry and points out a similarity between Manuel's first marriage with German princess Bertha of Sulzbach and the family ties of the fictional emperor in *Ille et Galeron*. More recently, Corinne Pierreville developed the implications of

<sup>73</sup> K. N. Ciggaar, *Western Travellers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 183-185; A. Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste...*, *op. cit.*, p. 164-165.

Fourrier's idea: "Seeing that *Ille et Galeron* reflects those tensions and the distrust of Romans towards Greeks, its composition must date back to 1170's".<sup>74</sup> The whole hypothesis seems plausible and if we reverse the last argument, we come to a conclusion that the oddity of *Ille et Galeron*'s representation of Byzantium and the author's very choice of such topic might have been a result of his original connection to Beatrix and her husband. This could also explain why Gautier did not adopt a similarly anti-Byzantine stance in *Eracle*, which he wrote under different patronage, that of Thibaut V, Marie de Champagne and Baudouin IV (or V) of Hainault.

Are there other explanations that would support or oppose such theory? Could Gautier's vision of Byzantium have been influenced by a particular source? No such source has been identified yet. Could it be a projection of the author's personal experience with the Greeks? Considering how little information we have or can be deduced about the author, nothing can be said with certainty. Karen Pratt hinted that in the process of writing of *Eracle* Gautier used a material of Byzantine provenance that he might have obtained during a visit in Constantinople, but she did not elaborate on the reasons that had led her to such assumption.<sup>75</sup>

Alternatively we might look at the problem also from the perspective of literary studies to determine what sets Gautier apart from other poets of the twelfth century. It has been firmly established by literary critics that the style of the romance in question is unusual for its realism. First of all, contrary to the custom of the romance genre, Gautier cast aside any supernatural elements. Secondly, the realism manifests also in psychological portraits of the characters and in allusions to historical reality.<sup>76</sup> The only other source of our sample that at least partly corresponds with the negative chroniclers' stereotype is the *Chanson d'Antioche*, which has very strong ties with a fairly contemporary reality as well. One may also notice that the negative figure of Emperor Alis and his usurpation in *Cligès* were probably inspired by historical events. What implications can we draw from this?

Let us broaden our perspective to the general question of difference between fiction and chronicles. Continuing the logic of the previous

<sup>74</sup> C. Pierreville, *Gautier d'Arras: L'autre chrétien*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Introduction to Gautier d'Arras, *Eracle*, *op. cit.*, p. xix. The information probably comes from A. Fourrier, who made such hypothesis on account of Gautier's exceptionally accurate description of Constantinopolitan statue of Justinian, which the author converted to the statue of Eracle in the fictional story. A. Fourrier, *Le courant réaliste...*, *op. cit.*, p. 246-251.

<sup>76</sup> Introduction to Gautier d'Arras, *Ille et Galeron*, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi-xxxvii.

paragraph, it could be that the patterns of representation of Byzantium were somehow dependent on realism or reminiscences of real historical events. One might also notice that the circumstances in which the Byzantines are depicted positively are not usually paralleled with known history and they form more fictive parts of the stories. Could we then see the infrequent occurrences of Byzantine negatives as tools in authors' efforts to provide verisimilitude? Or do they simply indicate passages where the poets drew from certain materials instead of their own imagination and reflected the anti-Byzantine attitude of the sources? Possibly, but these speculations do not suffice to resolve the whole problem.

Continuing our pursuit of reasons behind the discrepancy of representation it is inevitable to reflect on the conclusions of Marc Carrier. Although he reduces the positive image of Byzantium in fiction mostly to "l'image onirique de l'Orient" – which is understandable given that his analysis involved only the *Pèlerinage de Charlemagne* – he is correct in assuming that twelfth-century fiction had little in common with the critical accusations of crusading chronicles. Equally well-founded is his focus on a genre's function as a key to the specificity of fiction's portrayal of Byzantium. He pointed out that popular literature "conveyed a story according to criteria aimed to satisfy the interest of the European public"<sup>77</sup> and concluded that:

Evidently, the negative image of Byzantium was not what the European public called for in the popular literature, which was after all supposed to be entertaining. What was popular in the courts of France and elsewhere was a dream image of Byzantium, whose goal was simply to entertain the European public. Such a fact demonstrates a stress on the image of Byzantium as the West would have wished it, and not as it was in reality.<sup>78</sup>

One might develop this argument still further. The authors of fiction, which was primarily a form of amusement, were not preoccupied with interpreting real events whereas the historians had to come to terms with things like failure of a crusade or political tensions with Constantinople and had diverse

<sup>77</sup> M. Carrier, *L'Autre à l'époque des croisades...*, op. cit., p. 321.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323: "De toute évidence, une image négative de Byzance n'était pas ce que le public européen réclamait dans la littérature populaire, qui se devait après tout d'être récréative. Or, ce qui était en vogue dans les cours de France et ailleurs était une image onirique de Byzance, dont l'objectif était simplement de divertir le public européen. Un tel fait démontre une insistance pour une image de Byzance telle que l'Occident l'aurait souhaitée, et non pas telle qu'elle l'était dans la réalité".

reasons for stressing Byzantine faults. A chronicle, apart from claiming to be a more or less faithful narration of events, always had a political function: it was a tool of propaganda, a political statement intended to persuade the public to accept the version of history, which suited its instigator. Of course, imaginative literature could have been – and was – used to similar purposes, but this was not an essential attribute of the genre.

Another conclusion that emerges from the analysis presented here is that the phenomenon of fiction's positive representation and its particular form were indebted to certain internal rules and literary techniques. Firstly, a characteristic feature of medieval imaginative literature and of romances in particular is its liking for fantastic elements and magnificent descriptions of splendour. This made Byzantium – an interesting, distant, but also a Christian land – into a perfect inspiration for a story and led to highlighting of the magical and exotic attribute of the representation. The combination of Christianity and exoticism might have also inspired authors to create positive characters set in this milieu.

Secondly, medieval fiction had a firm system of standardized heroes and villains, which means that once a poet decided to have a Byzantine hero, this had to fit in with a predetermined set of qualities. The result was a standardized Western-like knight or a lady, whose Eastern origin had an only one function – to make them sound more interesting. Since the works of fiction did not strive to convey a real account of Byzantium but to stimulate and serve the audience's fantasy, it was not difficult to ignore cultural differences and appropriate the Byzantine world to Western values and preferences.

Eventually, as in the case of *Ille et Galeron*, we cannot exclude possible external influences on individual authors, yet this is difficult to determine considering how little we know of their identity. It is impossible to find out anything about their personal experience or contact with the Byzantine world. Sometimes we can speculate about possible oral or written sources of the preserved texts, but as far as I know there is nothing that could be linked to the instances where Byzantine characters are portrayed positively. Moreover, Gautier d'Arras was unusually explicit about his patronage. Possible dedicatees of the other poems are matter of discussion which is not of much help here. But, even if it is feasible to determine the region in which the particular chanson or romance circulated, this would not help us explain the diametrically different image of Byzantium in *Cligès* and *Ille et Galeron* that were both read at the courts in Champagne.

A way to better understanding of fiction's representation of the Byzantine character might involve investigating of historical parallels and circumstances

at the time of the texts' creation. However, as it has been already stated, the presence of the former in fiction usually corresponds with negatively coloured passages. As to the latter, Carrier suggested that the favourable Byzantine portrayal in the *Pèlerinage* reflected a period of tranquillization of Byzantine-Latin relations between 1155 and 1180 that can be identified in historiography of that time as well.<sup>79</sup> This theory is definitely appealing and the connection is not at all impossible, but we should yet avoid generalizations on account of the doubts that persist concerning the precise dating of the relevant poems.

At the very end of this broad discussion I can confirm the initial hypothesis about generic division between fiction and crusading chronicles regarding the image of Byzantium and the Byzantines. I would not claim that the present paper discussed all possible explanations of this interesting phenomenon, but it may have revealed at least some factors that contributed to the genesis of the two different representational systems. There is clearly room for more minute analyses of individual works that could lead to new momentous and generally relevant conclusions. However, this will not be possible, as I have tried to demonstrate, unless historians transgress boundaries of their domain and communicate with their colleagues from the field of literary studies.

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<sup>79</sup> It seems that Carrier did not consult *Ille et Galeron*, which again does not fit in to this concept.